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Iranian newspapers say American has confessed to spying for CIA

Reuters

TEHRAN, Iran — Tehran newspapers said yesterday that an American engineer arrested in Iran four months ago had confessed that he spied for the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency.

The newspapers carried the transcript of an interview with the American, John Pattis, that was said to have run on Iranian television Monday night.

Pattis, 50, from Aiken, S.C., was quoted as saying that he had worked in Iran since 1969 and had supplied the CIA with information about telecommunications installations and projects, black market money rates,

the health of Iranian leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, rationing, real estate prices and power cuts.

In Washington, a spokeswoman for the CIA said that it was against agency policy to confirm or deny any report on alleged agency activities.

"Anything we would say would certainly not help him one way or another," she said. "He's in a very tenuous position."

At the time of his arrest, Pattis was working for Cosmos Engineers Inc., based in Bethesda, Md., at Iran's main satellite ground station at Assadabad, about 200 miles southwest of Tehran.

Iraqi jets attacked Assadabad twice

from June through July, killing two workers and disrupting telephone and telex links. Iranian officials have informally alleged that Pattis provided information that helped the Iraqis stage the raids.

There have been no reports of a trial.

"I confess to my espionage activities," the newspapers quoted Pattis as saying. "But I believe authorities will agree with me that the information I gathered was not used to help the Iraqis in their war effort. So my activity was non-hostile."

"Most probably, I will spend a long time in prison. ... I don't think I will be freed from prison before there is a change in relations between the American and Iranian governments."

Pattis also was quoted as saying that he telexed information about Assadabad, including its air defenses, to his company headquarters. "One of the company officials knew about my cooperation with the CIA. He probably passed on the information," he said.

Pattis said his trips to Tehran for Cosmos Engineers had been on an Italian passport, in the name of Giovanni Pattis, supplied by his company.

Most of the thousands of Americans who worked in Iran while Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi was in power left during the 1978-79 Islamic revolution or after the takeover of the U.S. Embassy in 1979.

Pattis was quoted as saying that the CIA asked him for information about Iran's oil exports from its Kharg Island terminal in the Persian Gulf and for estimates of damage to oil facilities that was caused by Iraqi air raids.

"The CIA [also] wanted information about how Iran procured U.S.-made communications equipment and spare parts. I supplied two lists, which I acquired in 1984 and 1986," Pattis was quoted as saying in the television interview.